

# Keegstra's Children

James Keegstra taught his high-school classes in Eckville, Alberta, that the Jews are behind a worldwide conspiracy. Some still believe him.

ROBERT MASON LEE

ON JUNE 25, 1982—GRADUATION DAY FOR THE class of '82 at Eckville Junior-Senior High School—Dana Remillard stepped carefully into her new store-bought dress. She tugged at the mauve skirt, aligning it with the slip underneath, and pulled tight the laces of its bodice, which ran from the waist to the heart-shaped neckline. Then she turned her attention to her hair. It was long, luxuriantly golden, and, like everything else about her, aglow with health and vitality. She looked terrific. And to Dana, it was important to look her best. That night she was going to be a class valedictorian, one of three chosen from the hard-working and closely knit class of '82.

For Dana Remillard it had been a busy school year, marked by promise and success. On October 10 she'd gone shopping with her boyfriend, Ed Kreil, in Red Deer. He'd gone off by himself and returned, grinning, a few hours later. Dana playfully demanded to know what he'd been shopping for, and he showed her—an engagement ring.

They set the wedding date for after graduation. Dana had to balance Ed's attentive demands with her lessons, basketball, the Presbyterian church choir, Canadian Girls in Training, and her volleyball team, the Eckville Aces, which was about to go off to the provincials. And there was Mr. Keegstra's social studies class, with all those new notions and names and dates.

"Moles only come out in the dark when no one is watching," Dana wrote on exam day in Mr. Keegstra's class. "Jews only do their deeds when no one is watching. A mole when mad, will strike back and have no mercy if disturbed. Jews strike at any time and have NO mercy. No one knows the Jews are there until they strike." Mr. Keegstra penned in the words: "When cornered are dangerous," and gave her answer three out of three.

Dana's constant activity, her warm smile, and her charitable helpfulness had not gone unnoticed. Back before Valentine's Day, she'd found herself one of eleven girls vying to be the Queen of Hearts.

What can a monthly magazine do after the daily media have had their way with a news story, after all the notebooks, the cameras and the microphones have gone? The answer is found here on these pages. Robert Mason Lee hasn't only made a cohesive story from the discreet flow of items in the other media, he has provided context, background, drama and an engaging prose style. Magazine writing simply doesn't get any better than this.

The second-biggest event on the school calendar, next to graduation, the Queen of Hearts Ball is a gala affair in the high-school gymnasium. "But you wouldn't know it's a gym," Dana says. "Not with all the streamers and decorations."

"Hitler was one of the most successful people in the world ever to go against the Jews," the Queen of Hearts contestant wrote in an essay. "If people would have been listening, he could have rid the world of Jews forever. It's funny how people never want to hear the truth." In bold red pen, Mr. Keegstra had added: "But the Jews control the press, mass media, and the propaganda."

The Queen of Hearts is like a beauty pageant, though without the swimsuit and talent competitions. The winner is chosen by student vote. Dana and the other contestants lined up on the gymnasium stage, in front of blue cardboard sky and white cardboard clouds and doves surrounding a big red cardboard heart. The Queen of Hearts is the beauty queen, Miss Congeniality, and girl most likely to succeed all rolled into one. As the announcer opened the envelope and read the names of runners-up, Dana's excitement mounted. The final envelope was opened, and her name was in it! A bouquet of roses was placed in her hands. She was given a plaque, and a pretty locket. When the tiara was placed on her head, she cried.

Only one thing had tarnished that magical evening. Mr. Keegstra, her favourite teacher, did not attend. Jim Keegstra does not like beauty pageants, for the same reason he does not like the theory of evolution: because he views his students not as animals but as the unique and precious handiwork of God. Besides, Jim Keegstra does not dance. Neither does he drink, swear, gamble, or bear false witness. Jim Keegstra walks the razor's edge of righteousness.

But Mr. Keegstra, along with just about everybody else who mattered in Eckville, would be at the graduation ceremonies. Dana had polished her farewell speech until it fairly gleamed with sentiment, gratitude, and confidence in the future. She had reason for

such confidence, graduating with an 86 percent average, a chosen career as a rehabilitation practitioner, and the love of the handsome farm boy who had asked her to be his wife. As she left home for the ceremonies, she rehearsed the speech in her head, reflected on the year, and counted the blessings awaiting her.

The speeches came before the Grand March, when every graduating boy would parade on the arm of his mother and every beaming father would escort his young daughter. Dana took to the linoleum stage at the community centre and looked down on nearly 500 neighbours, schoolmates, and friends seated amid crepe-paper streamers and fluorescent plastic bows.

"I think we're going to miss those walls," she began, with a nod in the direction of the school. "Inside those walls, we got our precious education and our everlasting friends." The rest of her speech went smoothly, a rendering of the sentiments, exhortations, and promises typical of such valedictory addresses.

"Only as high as we reach can we grow," Dana said, drawing to a close. "Only as far as we seek can we go. Only as deep as we look can we see. Only as much as we dream can we be." She ended with a bit of advice that would prove prophetic for the last students to complete a full year of studies under Jim Keegstra. "Your future lies before you, like a path of fallen snow," Dana said. "Be careful how you tread it, for every step will show."

DANNY DESROSIERS WOKE AT NOON ON GRADUATION DAY, showered, and dressed. He adjusted his tie and fidgeted with his new suit. It required little adjustment; Danny had good carriage and an athletic body. That and his disarming grin, smiling eyes, and unruly mop of blond hair gave him the open-faced good looks of a California surfer. For Danny, the graduation ceremonies would be both a highlight and a swan song. As out-going president of the students' union and a high-school sports star, he wished he could have stayed at Eckville High. "Part of it, I guess," he recalled recently, "was being the head wheel."

Danny considered himself a shoo-in that night for the Weikum trophy, awarded for sports leadership and named after a teacher electrocuted some years back while working on a barn. But the more prestigious Eckford trophy, named after the town's namesake, would, he thought, probably go to Dana Remillard. The Eckford, an eagle perched atop a plastic pillar and wooden base, was awarded on the basis of overall grades and participation in extracurricular activities. It went to the school's best "all-around" student and was every bit as desirable as, say, the "all-around" trophy buckle awarded to the top competitor at the annual Eckville Rodeo.

If Dana did win the Eckford, Danny would be the last to complain. He was fond of Dana and best friends with her fiancé; in fact, Ed had already asked Danny to be his best man. Besides, what did it matter which of them won? They were both popular with their two dozen classmates. And they'd both excelled in nearly every sport and schoolroom subject—including social studies.

In one paper for Mr. Keegstra, Danny explained that the Jews have a goal of world government based in Israel by the year 2000, a goal rooted in the secret and mystical Illuminati movement. The goal, Danny wrote, would be achieved by a

five-pronged attack: the destruction of monarchies, as "monarchies cannot be infiltrated and poisoned by the Jews"; the dismantling of religions, especially Christianity, as "Christian people do not worship false gods and natural goods, therefore they will not worship the Jews"; the abolition of marriage, so "state-raised children will be taught that the state is supreme"; the confiscation of private property, because "property gives men a little piece of power. This power keeps them free"; and the eradication of all loyalty and allegiance to God, King, and Country, so "people will no longer fight for freedom because their country will mean nothing to them."

Danny's paper showed the plan at work in the French Revolution, in the bankrolling of Napoleon's "internationalist" metric system and "Talmudic" civil code, and in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. "As you can see," he concluded, "the Jews are truly a formidable sect. They work through deception and false tales to achieve their end. They are very powerful and must be put in their place."

Danny had found grounds for friendship with Mr. Keegstra: their mutual interest in cars. "I'd say cars are pretty important around here," Danny says. "Most everybody turns 16, they get a new truck. I got my first car four days before Grade 11. I was 15. I'd been working a year when I bought it." Danny has Polaroids of it in a picture album. It's a 1976 maroon Charger, and it's immaculate. It is viewed from the front, the rear, the side, and in three-quarter profile. In a number of pictures, a pretty girl is sitting in the car, smiling. "I paid thirty-eight hundred for it. Had it four years before I traded it off." Owning a vehicle in Eckville is not only important for hauling hay or livestock, or shopping trips. Another reason, Danny says bashfully, is, "well, for girls and stuff. Most of the guys park along the lease roads." The oil drilling activity in central Alberta brought an unexpected worry to parents and a boon to Eckville teens, who used the temporary roads into drilling sites as secluded lovers' lanes. The

## 1985 • T.O. Magazine • Cover

For about three years during the '80s, T.O. Magazine functioned as Toronto Life writ small, except for its art direction. Louis Fishau was then just starting to take the visual risks that would mark his spectacular career in graphic design. This collage was shot in three separate parts by George Whiteside—all but the purloined head, which Woody Allen would keep on losing for many years to come



drilling also provided entertainment for Danny and his friends, who spent many summer nights perched on the grasshopper pumps that dot the countryside around Eckville, drinking beer while the pump jack rocked back and forth, the motor hummed, and the hills heaved and fell around them.

Danny was dressed and ready for graduation by early afternoon, when some friends came over for a few drinks. Drinking was part of the life of the class of '82, though no-one had forgotten what had happened at a party two years earlier. The accident occurred near K.M.A. ("Kiss My Ass") Corner, a gathering place four miles north of town, near the garbage dump. On weekend nights in the summer, the class of '82 often gathered there, built a bonfire, and drank. One of Danny's friends once caused a minor sensation by tossing a hard hat filled with gasoline onto the bonfire, not realizing that a gallon of gas has about the same explosive power as a stick of dynamite.

One such party at the end of the 1980 school year started at noon. "Everybody had a few drinks," Danny recalls. "About five o'clock somebody went on a beer run." The 16-year-old driver, inexperienced at the wheel of a 1968 Dodge pickup, slid onto the shoulder of a gravel road. He whipped the steering wheel around to correct the skid, bringing the truck to the other side of the road and rolling it into the ditch. Two boys and two girls were in the truck; one girl was left paralysed from the waist down.

The tragedy was devastating, but it may also have served as a bond for the class of '82. And there were happier memories—such as the class hiking trip in the Rockies—that helped the class overcome its deepest division, that between the keen students and the others.

In his graduating year, Danny played volleyball and basketball, and he excelled in track and field. At a meet in Red Deer he set a new school record in the high jump. He pursued girls with the same ardour he brought to sports.

"There's only so many girls you meet and only so many guys for the girls," Danny explains. "It seems the ones that get married early are the best-looking ones. Then there's that many less to pick from, so you try to grab 'em quick." This results not in frenzied courting but rather in an early and touching fidelity. One of Danny's romances lasted two years. "In the whole time at high school," he grins, "I was only single three months."

At the graduation ceremony, Danny won both the Eckford and the Weikum trophies. "I was working for them for a year," he says, "but I was sure surprised when I got both of them." For Danny, as for Dana, it was a night to remember. One of the speakers, though, brought him back to earth. A former teacher warned of the difficulty ahead for job seekers during the economic recession.

Danny resented the recession, and he had a fair idea what had caused it. He also had a solution: "Social Credit is close to what Hitler's economic policy was. Social Credit might be able to change the way things are done."

DANA REMILLARD AND DANNY DESROSIERS WERE BOTH RAISED IN Eckville, on the outer rim of the Central Alberta Parkland, halfway between Calgary and Edmonton. The surrounding plains are scattered with aspen, larch, and birch, and roll with the last heave and swell of the Rocky Mountain foothills. Eckville is 25 miles west of

Red Deer, where the nearest Jews live, and 90 miles south of Edmonton and the nearest synagogue.

The town's history dates from the turn of the century. A settlement had already been cleared by Finns when Henry Kingsep, an Estonian immigrant, arrived on the banks of the Medicine River in 1903. Pleased with the thatch-covered log buildings nestled among the willow and Alberta rose, Kingsep sent a message home: come. "It was a promised land," recalls one Estonian. "It had rolling hills and was partly forested. It was better than what they had."

The first school, built in 1906, was the scene of long and heated community debates on politics and philosophy. Many of the early Estonians were sympathetic to the nascent communist movement, and the area had a communal farming arrangement, whereby farmers held their own land but shared labour, tools, and livestock. Kingsep was anti-ecclesiastical and he refused the use of the community hall for church services, so it was left to itinerant preachers to bury the dead: Finns at the Kuusamo cemetery, Estonians at Gilby Kalmu.

By the late 1940s, the town had acquired the outline and many of the buildings it has today. By the end of the Second World War it had a population of 195, a small high school, two stores, a small hospital, a doctor, a post office, drugstore, hotel, and beer parlour. The town's roads were unpaved and dusty, as many of them still are. People cooked on coal stoves and read by gaslight—electrical power didn't arrive until the 1950s. Piped water came with the water tower a decade later.

Today, the fields around Eckville are dotted with grazing herds of beef and dairy cattle, towering silver grain silos, and the occasional oil well. The town is several miles from the main highway, but is marked by a green government road sign: "Eckville, population 700." Residents have added another. "Welcome to Eckville," it says. "A good community to live in."

The only traffic light in Eckville is at the main intersection, a four-way red flasher ignored by people who stop their trucks to exchange news. Several stores are abandoned. The Eckville Co-Op sells groceries and dry goods, but Mayfair Foods closed down, as did Carritt Hardware. Moving pictures no longer flicker in the dark old Ecko Theatre; the lobby is now a health-food store. The painted wooden porch of the Eckville Hotel serves as a community billboard. Posters advertise the upcoming Rocky Mountain Smashers demolition derby, the Twilight Horse Sale at Cole's auction mart, and the Lacombe professional rodeo. The town's proudest building is the modern, brown-brick Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, but the busiest is Art Carritt's gas station, which sells gasoline by the gallon, and houses the Greyhound depot, the laundromat, and the weekly *Eckville Examiner*.

The walls of the tavern in the hotel are lined with rough, unpainted pine planks. Between the waxed dance floor and the large-screen television sit truckers in baseball caps and cowboys in straw hats, down vests, and rodeo buckles. The drinks of choice are short rye and beer from the bottle. The jukebox plays:

*There are no secrets in this town*

*Everyone knows everyone for miles and miles around*

*So if you're going to cheat on me*

*Don't cheat in our home town.*

Hanging from the walls, every table or so, are sun-bleached

cattle skulls. The horns point toward the ceiling, the snouts toward the customers. Inside each eye socket is a fiery red light bulb.

This is the town that welcomed Jim Keegstra in 1968. At the high school, the staff was concerned with changes brought about by the prosperity of the oil patch. The moral fibre of Eckville was showing signs of weakening; the student body would soon have its first teenaged unwed mother.

The boom provided local jobs hauling rigs and equipment, but the ready work in the oil patch cut high-school enrolment. Students were lured away by high pay and travel. The teaching staff had dwindled. A teacher was needed who was capable of handling a wide range of subjects. Jim Keegstra—with interests in science, drafting, mechanics, industrial arts, and social studies—was the answer to school-board prayers.

Keegstra was also a professed Christian, a man of strong character, and a firm disciplinarian (he was once charged with striking a student, but acquitted). His plain, no-nonsense way of dealing with students made them feel like responsible adults—not the peers of their new teacher, but people with lives that he found worthy of careful attention. Popular and respected, Jim Keegstra was an instant hit in Eckville.

ONE OF SEVEN CHILDREN OF A DUTCH DAIRY FARMER IN THE southern Alberta town of Kirkcaldy, Jim Keegstra was exposed in his early years to the United Church, the Nazarenes, and the Baptists. Later he attended the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute. He earned his mechanics papers in 1957, and in 1962 began teaching industrial arts in Cremona, Alberta. He got a bachelor of education degree in industrial arts at the University of Calgary in 1967. Two years later he experienced what he calls his "awakening."

"I got onto this through the Scripture," he said recently, in the tidy mobile home where he lives with his wife and the youngest of their four children. "Jim and Lorraine Keegstra and family" is burned into a little wooden sign out in front. "Here was a people who denied everything about Christ, yet they were called the chosen people. That is a contradiction."

And Jim Keegstra cannot abide a contradiction, since a contradiction bespeaks a lie, and lies are the paving stones on the road to where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. "I believe in the judgment, and I believe you'll be asked, asked how you could call God a liar. And if you call God's word a lie, you make Him to be a liar." Occasionally his long, thin fingers clutch the air, or his nostrils flare. His voice is persuasive, not stentorian. "If you call a people who deny the deity of Christ, who say Mary was a prostitute, who say He was a bastard—if you call those the chosen people, I say you are making God a liar."

After his arrival in Eckville, Keegstra left the Church of the Nazarene, which is millennialist and therefore, to his mind, infiltrated by Judaism in its end-time beliefs. He moved to the amillennial Diamond Valley Full Gospel Church, a log building in the wooded hollow of Diamond Valley, near Eckville. His son Larry is the pastor. What Jim Keegstra now considers the true church of salvation is but a splinter off the old rugged cross, but that doesn't bother him. "When

Christ said, 'Hey, it's going to be a little flock,' He meant just that."

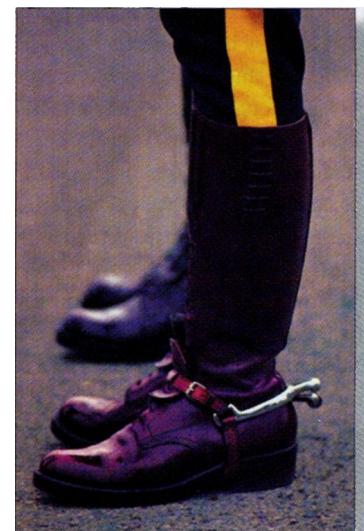
On the heels of Keegstra's religious awakening came a political one. Long a believer in Social Credit, he began searching for people who shared his ideas and found one in Ron Gostick, a Flesherton, Ontario, publisher of anti-communist material. "Around 1970 I started to get wakened up [politically]," Keegstra recalls. Ready to help with the awakening were the publications of the Canadian Intelligence Service (Gostick is the publisher) and contacts in the Canadian League of Rights (Gostick is the national director). Gostick is the son of former Alberta provincial librarian Edith Gostick, herself a Socred M.L.A. who entered the Alberta legislature on "Bible Bill" Aberhart's triumph in 1935, and returned on the ticket of Aberhart's successor, Ernest Manning, in 1944.

When Aberhart took control of Alberta with his ragtag crew of 56 newly elected Social Credit M.L.As, none of whom had ever set foot in the building before, he believed the Depression had been caused by governments that had issued money as interest-bearing debt to companies and individuals. These debts, he believed, could never be repaid. Aberhart demanded the province be given the right to distribute its own credit, in the form of per capita dividends to all residents. Aberhart's plan was quashed by the Supreme Court, and the subsequent Manning government eventually stopped pursuing it.

In his prime, though, Aberhart likened himself to a "provincial David," adding: "We face a Goliath today. By ingenuity we can deprive him of his power. The sling of credit loans without interest and the non-negotiable-certified stones will destroy his grip and deliver us from his power." He dismissed critics of his regime as "grafters, crooks, scheming politicians, insincere office seekers, henchmen of the financial interests, worshippers of the golden calf, fornicators and hypocrites."

## 1985 • Equinox • Photojournalism

**Ever since the '50s, the nitty-gritty realism of photojournalism has been a strong feature of magazine visuals. But lately it has got too costly in both dollars and space. Pity. This shot was taken from a narrative series by Ottmar Bierwagen, which reflected life at the RCMP boot camp just outside Regina.**



The conspiracy mentality was reflected nearly a half-century later by Gordon Kesler, the first Canadian separatist elected west of Quebec. Kesler was elected in 1982, in Jim Keegstra's back yard, the Olds-Didsbury riding. As an M L A representing the Western Canada Concept, he told delegates to the party's convention in Red Deer that they were engaged in a struggle with forces "in control of vast numbers of megacorporations, banks, media, and various union factions, as well as political movements."

In 1971 Keegstra sought, unsuccessfully, the Social Credit nomination for his riding in the provincial election that swept Peter Lougheed's Conservatives to power. "I found out then what skulduggery there was in the provincial Social Credit," Keegstra says. "The big shots said I was too Christian for them just because I said Alberta Education had gone red."

While in power in Alberta, the Socreds had abandoned their policies of monetary reform. Keegstra turned to the Douglasites, followers of Major C. H. Douglas, the British founder of Social Credit and arch proponent of monetary reform. Douglas was also an anti-Semite: he wrote Adolf Hitler in 1939 to warn, "The Jew... is the parasite upon and corruption of every civilization in which he has obtained power."

In 1971, Keegstra began teaching the anti-Jewish conspiracy theory to his classes. Given the political history of Alberta, Keegstra's stature in the community was not sullied by his conversion to anti-Semitism, to the Douglasites, or to amillennialism. On the contrary, it improved. He secured the federal Socred party's nomination in 1972 and again in 1974. Though he lost to Conservatives each time, he soon became Eckville's mayor. He had the respect of his students' parents and chatted with them about his ideas at the curling rink through the long winter months. Few chose to contradict the teacher-mayor with the plain speech and the facts and figures at his fingertips.

Keegstra was revered by most of his students. He was always willing to discuss his views on premarital sex (against), creationism (for), secular humanism (against), hanging (for), or abortion (against). He was willing, as well, to roll up his sleeves and take a wrench in hand to help some young fellow get his car back on the road. "To have a car that just had wheels that turned was your life," recalls one student. "He knew how to get one going, and keep it running."

With female students Keegstra was, he says, less popular. "With the boys I got along, with the girls, somehow or another, I didn't. A lot of it was the fact that I was a man. I taught shop, drafting, automotive, and they're all in the boy line, so it's natural, I suppose." Still, when Dana and Ed Kreil were considering the purchase of some land, after their wedding, Dana turned to Mr. Keegstra for advice.

Keegstra kept his classroom style loose, as long as his students were attentive. He would gladly drop the day's lesson to debate some issue in the news. As he never used notes or lecture plans, it was easy to abandon the blackboard and engage a student in debate. When he did, he might lean against the classroom laboratory sinks, or walk to the side of the student's wooden desk and rest against it.

"He was very convincing, forceful at times," one student recalls. "Like, if he was arguing with someone, he sometimes would come right up to your desk, and he would stand over top of you, and he believed in what he was saying, it was very obvious. You could tell. He had a certain look in his eyes."

According to Dana, Keegstra's keen interest could be interpreted differently. "It depends what eyes you were looking at him through," she says. "If you disliked him, he was glaring. If not, he wasn't." At the very least, Keegstra was a remarkably convincing teacher, with an eye for the sort of detail teenagers find unforgettable.

"Mr. Keegstra taught us a lot of Christian principles," says Gwen Matthews, a delicate and pious girl from the class of '82. "The golden rule. To have faith in God and not yourself. Though I don't agree with that. I think you should have faith in yourself, too." Gwen found her teacher's view of history novel, but not disturbing. "I wouldn't say I had an exact view of world history. It's a pretty deep subject. But I was open to suggestion." Besides, Keegstra laced his lessons with quotations from the Scriptures. "I believed anything that he backed with a lot of evidence," says Gwen. "Mainly evidence from the Bible. He knew the Bible inside out, cover to cover."

Themes of Biblical morality—or rather, of immorality—colour Gwen's classroom notes. "Christ told the Jews," she wrote, "'Your father is the devil, you are the children of Satan.'" Jewish-controlled Jacobins in the French Revolution, she noted, devised the "Feast of Reason: They carried aloft a number of prostitutes. They would strip her and lay her on the altar. Then they killed an innocent girl, and poured the blood on the hooker. Then they cooked the girl and ate her."

On Marxism, Gwen wrote that the "Jewish bum" Karl Marx had a daughter, Beatrice, who "got involved with Freud (Jew): sex orgies and drug orgies: involved in first nudist colony (demoralizing people): this was strictly to corrupt British people." According to her notes, the Fabians (a society of moderate British socialists) were organized to "whip young boys to death."

In an essay based on her notes, Gwen wrote that the Jewish conspirators organized on May Day, 1776, as the Illuminati, meaning "light from Satan," that their activities since have included "smearing Christians, spreading lies and butchering people," and that this was inevitable. "The Jews believe in violence and revolution to gain their end, while Christians believe in serving with compassion for each other. They live by the Bible, and the Jews live by the Talmud, where evil acts are encouraged."

Gwen now says that she was "kind of bewildered and confused" when she wrote the essay, "because I'd never heard of [the Illuminati] before. Then it began to make sense." That one group of people were evil and another good also made sense. "People are imperfect," she says. "It was almost as if I was sheltered before. I knew evil was going on in the world, but I was never exposed to it. I thought it was strange and awful. But it's believable that people can be evil."

Some students found the exposure to evil unsettling. Lorene Baxter, also from the class of '82, recalls one lesson vividly. "He just said that the Russians were going to come over and take over the world and we'd have a curfew at nine o'clock," she says. "If we weren't in, we'd be shot. And just, things like that.... I was upset.... I cried. I told my mom."

LORENE BAXTER WASN'T THE ONLY ONE WHO TOLD MOM. SO DID Paul Maddox, a 14-year-old student whose British-born mother, Susan, had moved to Eckville to marry a local farmer. A well-spoken nurse, Susan Maddox found her son's classroom notes offensive. "I was totally appalled," she recalls. Some things in her son's notes,

such as references to the Illuminati, were simply odd. Other references, to Jews, were disturbing. "I never realized such a thing could exist in Canada." Believing she would meet resistance in town and at the school, she considered taking her complaint to the school board. "I'd felt for years this vague idea that you had to be born and raised here to be part of the community." On the other hand, Keegstra, she knew, was "a good Christian man who went to church every Sunday." She complained to the Lacombe County School Board in the fall of 1982.

Board chairman Sandra Weidner and superintendent Robert David, who both live in the riding seat of Lacombe, were concerned. They called Keegstra to a special board meeting and asked him to explain. Keegstra did, willingly and at length. The prevailing mood among the 16 board members was dismay, but at least one supported the teacher's views. "The way he presented it I could find no fault in it," Bill Zuidhof said. "I agreed with what I heard."

Zuidhof was overruled, however, and the board ordered Keegstra to follow the approved provincial curriculum and stop teaching the world Jewish conspiracy theory as fact. Keegstra maintained that he was following the curriculum, and continued to teach his theories. In December, 1982, he was fired. Keegstra appealed the dismissal to a tribunal hearing before a Court of Queen's Bench justice.

At the hearing, the covers of the students' scribblers were opened, and news of what Keegstra had been teaching for the past 11 years became widely publicized. One student wrote in an essay that Jewish-controlled thugs would ride around in packs and bash in children's heads and rape the women and drown them. They would also cut open the stomachs of men and let them bleed to death. The essay reads: "In my opinion, this must come to a dead halt." Then, in conclusion: "We must get rid of every Jew in existence so we may live in peace and freedom."

In other students' notes, the Jewish conspiracy moves from Europe to North America. Hitler was lenient to the Jews, according to the notes, merely forcing them out of the country. As a result, four million ended up in the United States, including the "KGB agent" Henry Kissinger and "the Jew" Einstein. While Franklin Roosevelt struck a deal with the Zionists to secure the Jewish vote and the support of Jewish-controlled Hollywood and the press, William Lyon Mackenzie King fretted over the large number of Jews entering Canada. "There was no record of Jews coming in [and] taking over government offices." Canada was to pay for its folly with Pierre Trudeau and creeping socialism. Roosevelt paid for his when he "died of a severe brain haemorrhage. Probably caused by a bullet in the head."

When Keegstra fought in court to retain his job, he was backed by most of his students. Ninety-four signed a petition to have their teacher reinstated; only 20 refused to sign. In the town, meanwhile, another 128 parents and former students launched a petition to overturn the school board's decision. Nonetheless, in April, 1983, Madame Justice Elizabeth McFadyen upheld the school board's decision to fire Keegstra.

The Social Credit party of Canada and the Eckville town council were thrown into turmoil. Socred party president Martin Hattersley moved to force Keegstra to resign as vice president, but ended up quitting himself in the face of the party's widespread support for Keegstra. Two town councillors, the Eckville Chamber of Commerce, and the local Presbyterian minister sought to oust Keegstra as mayor. Keegstra had a 4-2 majority in the council chamber and ignored them. When criticized by the minister, Keegstra suggested to town council: "Should we send him a letter and say: 'Listen man, if you don't like Eckville there's nothing standing in the way of your leaving'?" The letter, he said, could invite the minister to "pull up his stakes and head back to the Maritimes."

Many residents of Eckville resented the attention focused on their town because of the Keegstra affair. They believed the attention was promoted by such "outsiders" as the Presbyterian minister and Susan Maddox, who had lived in the area for only 15 years.

"I think it's been blown out of proportion by the media," said one former student. "I think they should stay out and leave us alone."

Interest in the case peaked again in the fall of 1983, when Keegstra was stripped of his teacher's licence, and then in January, 1984, when he was charged by the Alberta attorney general, under section 281.2 of the Criminal Code, with "wilfully promoting hatred against an identifiable group—to wit, the Jews."

At a preliminary hearing into the charge last June, Keegstra was represented by Doug Christie, a Victoria lawyer and a founder of the Western Canada Concept. (Christie recently defended Ernst Zundel, the Toronto publisher convicted of knowingly publishing false information likely to cause harm to racial or social tolerance. Zundel, who published articles alleging that the Holocaust was a hoax, attended the opening of Keegstra's hearing in Red Deer. Keegstra, in turn, testified at Zundel's trial.) At the end of the preliminary hearing, at which many of Keegstra's former students were called to testify, Keegstra was committed to stand trial. As of late March, the trial was scheduled to begin in Red Deer on April 9.

At the high school, meanwhile, Keegstra had been replaced by Dick Hoeksema, whose parents were close friends of Keegstra's parents. Hoeksema simply regarded early news reports of Keegstra's teachings as false. When he arrived in Eckville from the University of Lethbridge in January, 1983, he was determined to remain neutral in the brewing controversy.

His students gave him little chance. "The students kept bringing the subject up continually," he says. "Our views differed on just about everything." He found himself cornered. When he raised the disturbing views of his students with others, he discovered widespread support for the beliefs. "Keegstra was in the lunch room with the teachers, too. People forgot he had as much influence with the staff as with students. I believe this could happen in Toronto or Ottawa, if you have someone as skilled as Keegstra in presenting his views."

Surrounded by converts, Hoeksema found himself questioning his own views. "I would say World War II started because Hitler invaded Poland and they'd say, 'No, Hitler liberated Poland.' I was

starting to think that I was crazy. That I was the only person who thought that way." He recalled his Dutch parents' telling him of having seen boxcars of Jews being sent to concentration camps, and of their shame at having believed that the Jews were merely being "relocated." "I thought those stories were maybe exaggerated," he says. "I started to doubt my own parents." Once introduced to the conspiracy theory, "I began to see bears in all sorts of woods."

In April, 1983, Keegstra, as mayor, presided over the opening of a burned-out portion of the school. "He said there was no use having the finest schools in the world if students weren't taught the truth. I remember thinking, 'My God, he believes this stuff.'" After that, Hoeksema began discussing the situation with his wife (whom he hadn't wanted to "drag into it") and seeking out others who disagreed with Keegstra.

One day he was approached by a reporter in the school gymnasium for his opinion of what Keegstra had taught. He refused comment, and the reporter walked away. "I realized then I had to tell the truth. I ran after her and said, 'I'm terribly appalled by what my students have been saying.' After that, everything became clearer."

Hoeksema offered to take to class a book called *The Yellow Star*, to show the reality of the Holocaust. A student replied that the pictures were all fakes. After all, the school library still contained books that supported Keegstra's theories, including *World Revolution*; and *Secret Societies...*; and *The Socialist Network*. One student referred to Nesta Webster, the author of the books, as "the world's foremost historian." Other students told Hoeksema that all textbooks were censored by the Jews, so any textbook he could present as evidence would not be valid. They told him Pierre Trudeau's ever-present red rose was a sign of the then prime minister's commitment to communism. It would be "okay" to kill Trudeau, said one student, but the conspiracy "would just replace him with somebody equally as corrupt."

Hoeksema found that the Grade 9 students had not even the most elementary understanding of how governments are formed and politicians elected. When he tried to explain the election process, one student stood up and shouted: "Don't believe him! He's not telling the truth!"

JIM KEEGSTRA BEGAN EACH SCHOOL YEAR WITH THE question of truth. His test for truth stressed consistency and simplicity; if a theory could not be contradicted by facts and was less complex than other theories, it was more likely true. On that foundation, he began each year to construct his house of mirrors.

The world Jewish conspiracy theory—the manifestation of anti-Semitism taught by Keegstra—arose, he told his students, with the imperialist tensions that led to the First World War. Nationalists in many European countries attacked Jewish "internationalism" and the Jews' alleged ties to the Freemasons. Books such as Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* focused on three charges against Jews: that they were a disintegrative moral, political, and cultural force in the countries in which they lived; that they were at the centre of economic domination and monopoly; and that they were involved in a world conspiracy.

These three themes recurred in Keegstra's teachings. Like virtually all modern anti-Jewish conspiracists, Keegstra

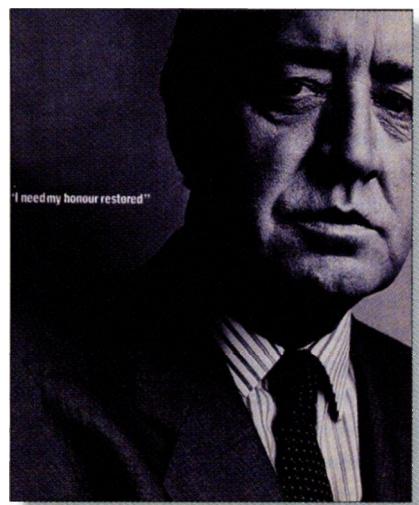
views as proof of his theories a notorious fabrication known as the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, which is supposedly a report of secret meetings held in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897. At that time, the Jews purportedly conspired with the Freemasons to erect a world state on the ruins of Christendom. Published in Russia in 1903, the *Protocols* were first shown to be spurious by Philip Graves, Constantinople correspondent for *The Times* of London. In 1921 he demonstrated their resemblance to a satire on Napoleon III by Maurice Joly, published in 1864. A committee of prominent U.S. historians published an appraisal of the document in 1942, denouncing it as a hoax. All the history books will tell you that the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* is a fabrication. Which is proof, for Jim Keegstra, of the conspiracy at work. The hoax, he believes, was the denunciation of the *Protocols*. For believers like Jim Keegstra the false document is sacred.

SUCH IS THE MAIN PANEL IN KEEGSTRA'S HOUSE OF MIRRORS. ONCE exposed to the conspiracy theory, his students found it difficult ever again to view evidence to the contrary without suspicion. If the Jewish conspiracy were as powerful as Keegstra said, then all proof of its existence would have been wiped from mainstream books, magazines, and thought. If the Jewish conspiracy really does exist, then it would move with wrath against Keegstra and his teachings. If the conspiracy does not exist, some students wonder, then what invisible hand moved so forcefully against their teacher?

The self-sustaining logic of conspiracy erects barriers to any external, opposing facts; it recognizes them only when contradiction can be turned into confirmation. Contradiction becomes the conspiracy's source of tenacity; any argument raised to abolish it becomes twisted upon itself; the anti-Jewish conspiracy is an animal that feeds on its predators.

## 1985 • Saturday Night • Studio Photography

The warts-and-all photography of Nigel Dickson has been a controversial part of the look of Canadian magazines since the '80s. Art directors line up to commission his tough portraits but his subjects aren't always as thrilled with the outcome. Here, he gives a touch of drama to the tired face of old pol Bryce Mackasey.



## Keegstra's Children • Robert Mason Lee

In Eckville, steps were taken to wipe out Keegstra's legacy. A Calgary businessman, Jack Downey, sponsored a two-week trip to Germany for two students. One of them, Gary Tink, had been in Keegstra's class. He was devastated by a tour of the Dachau death camp. He says he now has a new perspective and will not be as receptive as he once was to anti-Semitic remarks. Six other students attended a seminar on the Holocaust at the University of British Columbia. And Donald Brittain, the director, screened his film *Memorandum* at the high school. The film shows naked corpses of slain Jews in German concentration camps.

For some students, though, these measures backfired. They became evidence of the conspiracy at work in Eckville—conspiracy aimed, for the moment, at eradicating belief in the conspiracy. The students' belief was reinforced when they saw their teacher ejected from class, stripped of his credentials, and hauled before the courts.

"This is the time the Jewish conspiracy group wants to build some sympathy," said Danny Desrosiers. "They see little hick Eckville, and think if they can take this and make a big enough thing out of it and nail him with a charge, they can use this as an example to scare off others."

In Eckville, where the Keegstra case has frayed the town's fabric for more than two years, even a reluctance to discuss the conspiracy can be taken as evidence of it. "I think a lot of people are tired of hearing about it," says Gwen Matthews. "But perhaps people are scared he's stumbled onto the truth, and they don't want to know about it."

Keegstra's house of mirrors also contains a reflection of the face of Jim Keegstra himself. There the student trained in "truth" must come to terms with Jim Keegstra the same way he would deal with a man who claimed to be the Son of God, or a jellybean, or anything else new and jarring. The man must be either a madman, or a liar, or else telling the truth. Jim Keegstra never struck anybody as mad. And he would never knowingly tell a lie. Besides, his credibility was bolstered by what he taught—the dates and places of history, its nuts and bolts. He did not stand history on its head, merely interpreted it. "Instead of just giving us events, dates, and people, he'd give us the reason for things, linking it together," says Danny. "What he said niched into what our school books said. He just filled in the blanks."

What Keegstra did turn topsy-turvy in his students' minds was not the mechanics of history, but its driving force: the motivation of men. Pure motives—democracy, fairness, equality—are ascribed to one camp, and evil motives—power, greed, domination—to another. Evil becomes an externalized illness. "Inch by inch, second by second, the evil forces behind this disease, dreaded by every free man, are taking over the world," wrote one student. "In this essay, I wish to show you how the virus of this disease consists of one kind of people. The Jews...."

"Consider the atomic bomb, I told my students," Keegstra recalls. "Jewish scientists were involved in its creation. Why drop it on the two cities in Japan that were basically Christian? Was it an accident, or was it deliberate?"

Gwen Matthews, asked if she had been taught to hate, replied: "I think we should be free to hate if we're free to

love. If we love something, we must hate the opposite of it. If we love God, then we must hate the Devil." It was all God and Devil? Us and Them? We and the Enemy? "I would say there were those characteristics to it," Gwen allows. "But that's how we see it. They might say we're wicked and evil."

TODAY GWEN MATTHEWS LEADS A QUIET LIFE, WORKING AT AN OIL company field office near Eckville, retiring each evening to her parents' mobile home north of town. Her father's tractor-trailer units line the drive and the outdoor shed is posted with every license plate since 1960. There, she tends her plants, two small dogs, and three cats. Her mother puts coffee and biscuits on the table; her father plays cribbage with a neighbour. Gwen sips coffee. Her porcelain features take on a pensive cast as she gazes out the window. "I'm not going to dedicate the rest of my life trying to find out the answer," she says. "At least now I know two versions. And I think people are at an advantage because they've been exposed to something different. It was almost as if I was sheltered before. I knew evil was going on in the world, but I was never exposed to it. Mr. Keegstra didn't hate the Jewish people. He's just saying beware of them. He's enlightened us."

Dana Remillard Kreil now lives in a mobile home she and Ed bought for their farm outside Eckville. It's neatly kept, and Dana is as busy as ever. When not working as a rehabilitation practitioner in Rocky Mountain House, or leading her C G I T group, or tending chores, or taking lunch to Ed in the field, she sometimes sits at the kitchen table with her fluffy white cat and thinks back over her school days. "I compare this story to a fire," she says. "Sometimes it burns down to the embers, but then something always keeps it going. The farther I get away from graduating, the less I remember. People say we're brainwashed. That we're the people in the cage

## 1985 • Toronto Life • Magazine of the Year

Twice magazine of the year, *Toronto Life* has always depended on opposites to attract readers. Every month, serious stories slug it out with glitzy guides. Guess which side sells best on newsstands? Covers like these—featuring a self-made socialite and dining after the theatre—are sure winners, even with the editor, Marq de Villiers, playing the bard on one of them



who believe this. Well, if you sit in front of that TV set, you'd get brainwashed, too."

Dana doesn't like to talk about her beliefs very much, partly because she's confused, partly because of the reception she gets "outside," in places such as Red Deer and Rocky Mountain House. "People say Mr. Keegstra's a second Hitler," she says. "Well, I get pretty upset with that. Sometimes I think I'm the only one left for him." She smiles self-consciously and pretends to hold a billboard sign above her head. "I'm for Jim Keegstra." Lowering her hands, she adds: "But not necessarily his beliefs. I like and respect him and don't want to see him hurt. But they think I'm a follower, like a Moonie or something."

Dana was one of the students who testified at the preliminary hearing. "The night before court I cried. I thought, 'What am I going to wear?'" After her appearance, she had other worries. Portions of her class notes and essays were read in court and published in newspapers. One essay finished with: "I never really knew much about Jews until this year. In other grades, all I was told was that the Jews are a RACE that are discriminated against. They had never had a fair chance. But not one of the teachers ever stopped to tell me of their T R U E origin. This year I learned of their origin and their wicked plans, and I am very scared that the world is going to fall to them. I only hope that we Christians will be strong enough to fight off their Satanic hate."

After her court appearance Dana felt people were staring at her and was once met with the greeting: "How's the Jew-hater?" Dana clenches her fist and gently pounds the table. "I do not hate Jews!" She was taught about "them and about 200 other nationalities," she explains. "It's Khazars and Zionists and if there's Jews in there, yes." But she has also heard that Khazars and Zionists refer to subgroups of Jews. "I'd like to get it straight in my mind," she sighs. "All I know is it all has something to do with jay-ee-double-you."

Dana regrets having written the essay, and wonders what was going on in her mind. "I was writing very late at night in desperation trying to get it done," she says. "When a Saturday night date is the biggest thing in your life, you're not too worried about the satanic hate of the Jews," she adds with a laugh. Looking back now, she believes her essay was overstated. "We're trying to figure out what's right. You want to believe what's right, but it's hard to tell what's right and wrong anymore."

Danny Desrosiers now makes his way from house to house in Eckville as a television repairman. He's not worried about what he wrote back then in Jim Keegstra's class, because it's what he believes now. And he shares his beliefs with anyone who will listen. "I haven't run into anybody hostile," he says. "The ones that agree most are the European types—German or Dutch people who'd seen what was going on there. Most people, by the time I finished talking to them, agree with what I say."

WHAT DANNY TELLS THEM, IN HIS CHEERFUL, MATTER-OF-FACT way, is this: "Now, when Hitler went into power, it was a different system than ours, but better in a lot of ways. Germany put a Volkswagen in every driveway, and all business was private enterprise. Look, Germany had gone through the First World War, but 20 years later they were back to being one of the richest, if not *the* richest, countries in the world."

"The reason Hitler wanted the Jews out of the country is they didn't agree with the system of government he had. The Jews were in control of the banks and financial institutions. With Hitler, if you wanted a loan, you just had to go to the government. They'd write you a cheque and you'd pay maybe two percent interest. One reason the Second World War was probably started was just so the Jews could sell a bunch of arms."

"Now, I've yet to see hard evidence, other than a few guys who are Jewish coming into Eckville saying, 'I'm Jewish and six million died.' Mr. Keegstra has a census, and according to it there weren't even six million of them in Germany. When you look at pictures of 2,000 bodies, how can you tell which are Jewish or German?"

"One reason they had those big graves is a type of head lice they had that got into your hair and sucked your blood. Like, they sucked the nutrients right out of you. You see the pictures of those scrawny bodies and say the Germans weren't feeding them. Well, it doesn't matter how much food they give you if the parasites are sucking the nutrients out of your blood."

"They had those tattoos. How else are you going to keep track of thousands of people? They brand cattle. You can't change a tattoo like you can a shirt. And they had to shave their heads to keep the lice down. And walk through those showers. All the clothes were put on racks and run through the gas chamber to kill the lice. I think they said those ovens would have taken four hours at 8,000 degrees. That's not a very cost-efficient way to kill people."

"Hitler's economic policy was good. But if you got up in Parliament and said that, they'd call you a Nazi and a Jew killer and throw you out on your ear so fast.... If he would have been able to unite the Germanies, Germany would be an extremely advanced nation and the rest of the world would be playing catch-up. It still is one of the most advanced countries. Maybe one race of people is born smarter than anybody else."

"Mr. Keegstra told us a Toyota or a Datsun is just the Japanese version of the Volkswagen. That's one reason I don't think everybody is equal—some races are mechanically inclined, a black is maybe more athletically inclined, maybe more physically adept than mentally adept. Or a Japanese or a Chinese guy is technically adept. That master race idea had a good basis. It was strictly an experiment that everybody blew out of proportion. They just wondered if you could come out with people more intelligent and healthy."

Besides repairing television sets, Danny worked for a time as a disc jockey at a local tavern. He plays volleyball and is learning karate. He still lives with his parents. He likes to relax in the television room of their new town house, but he finds there's not a lot to watch on television any more.

"It sours me," he says. "I'm trying so hard to be open-minded and they're close-minded. And it's subconscious, that bias." As an example of bias, Danny points to a television ministries about aliens invading earth, "V."

"A normal person would say it's just another science-fiction show," he says. "But I could see a direct connection between it and what was supposed to have happened with Hitler. These aliens are supposed to be Germans and all the earth people are supposed to be Jews."

Danny frowns, seeking a way to sum up his views. "Mr. Keegstra used to say history, on its own, is of no value at all. But if you don't know what went on, you're bound to repeat it."